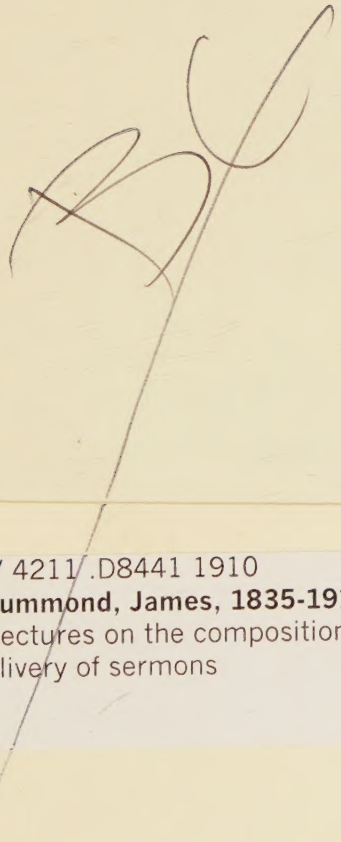
LECTURES ON THE COMPOSITION AND DELIVERY OF SERMONS

JAMES DRUMMOND



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Lectures on the composition and delivery of sermons

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LECTURES

ON THE

Composition and Delivery of Sermons

BY

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PREFACE

THESE Lectures were delivered to the London Lay Preachers' Union, and are now published by request, in the hope that they may be of use not only to those who heard them, but to some others, who may wish to have in a small compass a few helpful suggestions in their preparation for the work of preaching.

JAMES DRUMMOND.

Oxford, *August*, 1910.

CONTENTS

LECTURE I. PAGE

NATURE AND CLASSIFICATION OF SERMONS

Two cautions 1
Origin and growth of sermons 2
Nature and object of sermons 4
Sermons not limited to a professional class . . 6

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERMON 8
1. Addressed to the feelings and the will . . 9
2. Distinguished from a political oration . . 10
3. Distinguished from an essay 12
4. Use of a text 14

CLASSIFICATION OF SERMONS 20
1. The meditative sermon 20
2. The expository 23
3. The persuasive 29
4. The argumentative 31

LECTURE II.

THE COMPOSITION OF SERMONS

Two things involved: composition and style . . 35
Unity a fundamental law 35

THE PARTS OF A SERMON 40
1. *Introduction* 40
2. *Development* 49
(1) Unity 49
(2) Co-ordination 52
(3) Order 52
(4) Distribution of the subject 54
3. *Conclusion* 64
Schemes 66

APPENDIX TO LECTURE II.

Two Schemes as Samples 68

CONTENTS

LECTURE III. PAGE

STYLE AND DELIVERY

Definition of style 73
Style should be suited to the subject and the occasion 74

QUALITIES OF GOOD STYLE 75

1. *Perspicuity* 76
Causes of obscurity 77
(1) Want of clearness of thought . . . 77
(2) Want of adaptation to the audience . 78
(3) Faults of style 81
a. Faulty structure of the sentence . 81
b. Faulty arrangement of the clauses 84
c. Careless use of pronouns, and of antecedents 87
d. The use of technical, learned, or ambiguous words 88
e. Circumlocution, and grandiose words 90

2. *Force* 92
Sources of weakness 93
(1) Diffuseness 93
(2) Use of generalities and abstractions . 95

3. *Beauty* 95
(1) Rhythm of the sentences 96
(2) Metaphor and simile 97
(3) Personification and apostrophe . . . 103

DELIVERY 105
1. Audibility 105
2. Emphasis 106
3. Variety and expressiveness of tone . . . 108
4. Action 110

Lecture 1

NATURE AND CLASSIFICATION OF SERMONS

Let me enter on the subject of these lectures by suggesting two cautions. In the first place, I may have to set before you a very high ideal of the preacher's office. I must hope that in doing so I shall not discourage you, but rather rouse you to a keener enthusiasm. To gaze at that which is perfect may indeed excite a momentary despair, because it lies so far beyond our possible attainment; but the surer our gaze, and the higher our aim, if we are actuated, not by ambition, but by a simple love of perfection, the more nearly shall we approach it. Thus the loftiness of our ideal may at once inspire our most earnest efforts, and keep us humble in the contemplation of that which we can never attain.

The second caution is this. The rules which I may have to lay before you are to be regarded

as helps, to be used at your discretion, and not as laws to which you must slavishly conform. Most rules admit of exceptions, and in regard to some there may be legitimate differences of opinion; and though it may often be wise for a beginner to consult his rules, and follow them deliberately, perhaps their greatest utility consists in training the mind to work spontaneously according to the best methods. The rules to be observed in the composition of a sermon are founded upon the nature and object of preaching, and are to a large extent generalized statements of the practice of the most successful preachers.

This being so, our first duty must be to distinguish the sermon from other species of composition, and to gain a clear conception of its special character and purpose. The origin of the sermon is found in the peculiar veneration with which the Jews regarded their law. This law was not a mere civil code, which men might alter at their discretion, in order to meet changed social or political conditions, but was regarded as the divine and unalterable basis of religion. The rule of faith and practice, therefore, in contrast with Greek and Roman religion, was incorporated

in a book. Every one, accordingly, had access to the divine source of religion, and it was possible for him either to read it himself or to hear it read in public. It was important for the religious fidelity of the people, and even for their separate national existence in their scattered communities throughout the Roman empire, that they should be well instructed in the law. Provision for this instruction was made in the worship of the synagogues. Prescribed portions were read from the law and the prophets, and an address was given, not by an official, but apparently by any competent person, in explanation of what had been read. Of this we have an example in Christ's discourse at Nazareth, as recorded in Luke iv.

The practice of the synagogue gave the first Christian missionaries an opportunity of addressing their countrymen in a familiar way, until opposition was aroused, and they were driven forth, and compelled to form separate societies. Of this we have several examples in the book of Acts. The habit of preaching or prophesying was retained in the Christian assemblies, and became a settled institution in the Church. The sermon was at first a free exposition of a passage of

Scripture which had been read. As the congregations grew in size, and primitive simplicity diminished, more formal methods became necessary, and it gradually assumed its present character, that of an oratorical discourse, adapted to a single text. Of this we have well known examples in the sermons of Chrysostom.

From this account of its origin it will be seen that the aim of the sermon is the improvement of the moral and religious life of a people, without distinction of ranks, by means of the exposition of sacred books or the enforcement of their lessons. It is well to remember that 'the foolishness of preaching' afforded a very strange spectacle to the cultivated Greek or Roman. He was, indeed, familiar with the orations of philosophers or rhetoricians, who declaimed on moral and religious topics to select groups of educated men; but he thought it absurd to bring these high themes before the attention of the vulgar, and he regarded with contemptuous wonder the results among the Christians, who, through obstinacy, as he imagined, displayed a self-denial and heroism which put philosophers to the blush. They could not understand the power with

which a holy personality appealed to the untutored soul, and the faith in things spiritual and divine which arose spontaneously in response to that appeal. The Christian sermon, then, was distinguished from the pagan oration, with which it might be compared, by these two marks: it was addressed to the multitude, assembled for religious worship, and was intended to influence the whole body of the people; and, secondly, it was based upon a sacred literature, whose grandest lessons were embodied in a dominant personality, and made powerful by a devout and loving allegiance to that Prince of love. These distinguishing characteristics have remained down to the present day; and, for my part, I am old fashioned enough to believe that the spiritual efficacy of preaching is on the whole proportioned to the consistency with which they are maintained. The pagan oration, with its limited appeal and rationalistic coldness, will, if revived, prove itself, I am persuaded, as barren as of old, amusing the intellect and gratifying the conceit of enlightenment, but leaving untouched the higher regions of the soul, and never quenching the thirst for God.

I may next observe that the preaching of sermons is not, by nature, limited to a professional class. Here let me say that in speaking of laymen I acknowledge no spiritual distinction between clergy and laity. I believe, indeed, in the advantage, perhaps even in the necessity, of having a ministerial profession; and when I speak of a layman, I use the word, as a lawyer or a physician might do, to denote one who does not belong to the profession. Now, the profession, like the other learned professions, requires a long and elaborate training, and the years spent in study at Oxford or Manchester are not too numerous. Nevertheless, the power of effective preaching depends more upon native gifts and upon general culture and knowledge of mankind than upon special scholarship; and therefore there is no intrinsic reason why this important part of public worship should not be shared in by laymen. And further, the layman has some special advantages; and from the beginning of my own ministry I have always wished that earnest and religious laymen could be induced to allow their voices more frequently to be heard in the pulpit. The layman is free

from all suspicion of saying things because it belongs to his profession to say them. Moreover he has a more intimate knowledge of ordinary life, and therefore of the temptations to which men are subject in the pressing affairs of every day; and accordingly, when a man comes from the mill or the exchange or the bank or the offices of trade, and speaks from his heart to those who are engaged in the same perennial struggle, there is a natural authority in his appeal which the preacher by profession finds it difficult to secure. Nevertheless, it may be well to add that, if a layman gave himself to the office of preaching, not because he felt spiritually impelled to do so, but because he was a fluent speaker and fond of hearing his own voice, he would be more likely to indulge in ineffective platitudes than the professional minister. Preaching is a function to be adopted only with serious purpose, and with humble consecration to the high and unselfish ends which it is intended to promote.

I have referred to general culture. This should be pursued with some attention to its bearing on the work of the preacher. You know what great

service lay preaching has rendered to Methodism, and I may be pardoned for quoting the advice which John Wesley gave to one of his preachers who neglected to improve himself by reading. 'Hence,' he says, 'your talent in preaching does not increase: it is just the same as it was seven years ago. It is lively, but not deep: there is little variety; there is no compass of thought. Reading only can supply this, with daily meditation and daily prayer. You wrong yourself greatly by omitting this: you can never be a deep preacher without it, any more than a thorough Christian.' At the same time he is quite aware that a man may be 'swallowed up in books,' and that 'an ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge.'[1]

We must now view with greater particularity the characteristics of a sermon. In seeking to improve the moral and religious life of a people it cannot address itself mainly to the speculative intellect; for an appeal of this kind would affect only the cultivated few, and would leave even them untouched by that fine enthusiasm which would lift their feeling and practice to a higher

[1] Southey's *Life of Wesley*, II. pp. 78sq.

level. It is indeed necessary that the understanding should be convinced, and there may be occasions when the sermon must aim chiefly at producing intellectual conviction. But, speaking generally, we may say that its object is to establish or strengthen in the feeling and the will that which is already admitted, but not sufficiently wrought into the permanent character; or, in other words, it must exhibit and enforce the application of old and acknowledged truth to every-day life. As F. W. Robertson says, 'Religion is Life, and right instruction in Religion is not the investigation of obsolete and curious [we might add, of new and doubtful] doctrines, but the application of spiritual principles to those questions, and modes of action, which concern present existence, in the Market, the Shop, the Study, and the Street.'[1] And a greater than Robertson, the Apostle Paul, points out the failure of wisdom, as it was taught in the philosophical schools, to lead mankind to God; whereas Christian preaching, discarding the method of the schools, came with 'demonstra-

[1] *Expository Lectures on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 2: quoted by F. W. Fisk, *Manual of Preaching*, p. 204.

tion of the spirit and of power,' and kindled a wakeful faith by appealing to the slumbering faith of the soul, searching out the deeper intuitions of divine things, and satisfying the vague and groping wants of the heart.

These remarks may enable us to distinguish the sermon from other kinds of composition to which it is most nearly allied. A sermon, even though it may be delivered from a manuscript, is essentially a speech; for it is addressed to an audience, and is thus marked off from writings, such as histories or scientific treatises, which are primarily intended to be read. Among speeches it has some obvious affinity with the political oration, for the object of both is to affect conduct, and both may appeal, at least occasionally, to the same motives. Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction between them, which I think the preacher would do well to observe. A sermon has to exhibit conduct in the light of religion and morality; a political oration generally deals with questions of expediency, and on these there may be wide differences of opinion among men who accept the same moral principles. Such doubtful questions of expediency are not suitable

subjects for the pulpit, for they do not tend to the inculcation of any moral principle. The force of this consideration is sometimes evaded by what appears to me to be very fallacious reasoning. It is said quite truly that religion affects the whole of life, and therefore everything connected with human conduct comes within the province of the religious teacher. Yes, but there are two aspects of conduct which are absolutely different in their character. George Herbert teaches us that sweeping a room may be a fine and religious act. This humble occupation, therefore, comes under the survey of the preacher, and he has to teach the housemaid to do her work faithfully and cheerfully as in the sight of God; but it is not his business to instruct her in the easiest and most efficient way of doing it. That is a question of technical expediency, with which, as a preacher, he has nothing to do. The distinction between morality and expediency is, of course, not always so obvious; but if preachers bore it carefully in mind, they might be saved from some mistakes and misunderstandings. There is also another point which, I think, sometimes misleads the

judgment. When we are convinced that a certain line of action is expedient, it may become *our* duty to follow it; and then, by a natural confusion, we think it is every one's duty, whereas it is the duty of those who think it inexpedient to oppose it. This is the real reason why party politics are out of place in a sermon. It is not because they may irritate the feelings of some foolish and excitable people, but because it is assumed that both parties are equally anxious to promote the best interests of the community; or, in other words, they differ on questions of expediency, not of morality, and in relation to questions of the former kind the pulpit has not only no special advantage, but has some disadvantages. There may, however, be occasions when a preacher is so convinced that his country is acting wickedly that he feels himself bound to protest, and take the consequences; but such occasions are rare, and a man should endeavour thoroughly to understand the whole question before he assumes the prophet's function of rebuke.

Another kind of composition to which the sermon is allied is the essay. It is a frequent

complaint against sermons by Unitarians that they are essays, and I cannot help suspecting that the smallness of our congregations is partly due to some deficiency which is described in this way. I have sometimes heard Unitarians lamenting that they got very little benefit from the services in their chapels. The sermons, it is said, are well composed and sensible; but somehow they do not affect the life, or make the week's care and toil any easier. Now, what is the meaning of this complaint? How ought a sermon to differ from an essay? They may treat of the same themes. They may proclaim the same opinions. How do they differ? They differ in their ultimate object. It has been defined in this way: 'The design of an essay ends in a judgment, of an oration, in an act.'[1] An essay is intended to be read, and seeks to communicate knowledge, to influence our opinion, or to improve our taste; and if it sometimes flashes with prophetic fire, and stirs us to action, it is departing to that extent from its own special province. But the sermon is an oration, intended to have a rousing appeal to the emotions and the will,

[1] Fisk, p. 83.

and owing its efficacy both to the literary mode of presenting the subject and to the impressive manner of the speaker. Most congregations expect a sermon to speak, as it is said, to the heart, to touch the inner springs of nobler life, and to lift them, at least for the time, into a purer atmosphere of reverence and consecration.

The strength of the appeal is, I believe, appreciably increased by the ancient practice of using a text. It is true that modern research has compelled us to adopt a widely different view of the Bible from that which formerly prevailed. We cannot truthfully speak as though our text were an immediate utterance of God, and therefore possessed absolute and unquestionable authority, and all sayings outside the Bible were merely human, and destitute of weight. It might seem, therefore, an empty superstition to retain the Scriptural text, instead of discarding the text altogether, or selecting it from the writings of any eminent author. From the purely intellectual point of view this may be so; and if anyone is afraid of superstition, arising from the exceptional use of the Bible, he might do well to vary his practice, and preach occasion-

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ally without a text, or with one borrowed from the writings of some non-biblical sage. But I believe our change of view is intellectual rather than devotional, and that while the theological use of the Bible is completely altered, the religious use remains practically what it has always been. Men valued most the passages which appealed to their own experience, which lifted a burden from their hearts, or gave them strength to overcome some besetting temptation, or brought home to them the love and forgiveness of God. And so it is still. There are times when the soul asks no questions, and is simply receptive, and then some venerable saying, such as 'All things work together for good to them that love God,' a saying born of anguish and triumphant faith, drops as a veritable voice from heaven upon the longing heart, and fills it with trust and peace. So long as we are in any sense Christian, the Bible, and especially the New Testament, must occupy a place apart. Its finest teachings have the natural authority of the greatest religious teachers, and of the reverence of innumerable men who have tried to fashion their lives in accordance with the Spirit of God. This man or that may be more

impressed by some modern writing; but the Bible alone is common to Christendom, and though the sects differ so widely from one another in their theological interpretations, there is a grand consensus as to its spiritual value, and when we reach the heart of Christian devotion we are obliged to own the unity of the Spirit.

Such is the main justification of the use of a text. This use has also some practical advantages, which we ought not readily to forego. The text may sum up in weighty and accepted words the truth which we wish to enforce. Thus it arouses attention to the subject at the very beginning, and helps the memory to retain the main theme of the discourse. Again, it is in every one's hands, and even if it has not been much regarded, the audience is prepared to consider with respect and appreciation whatever truth it may contain; and a good sermon may establish such an association of noble thoughts with the passage in which it occurs that henceforth it will speak to the hearers in their privacy with richer and more elevated meaning. And lastly, though this is perhaps less obvious, it brings both the speaker and the hearers into a wider fellowship, while

they meditate on words which have impressed the hearts of multitudes in many ages and countries.

As the text is not, properly speaking, part of the sermon, this may be the most convenient place for a few further remarks. The question may be asked, ought the theme of the sermon to be developed from the text, or the text to be chosen to suit the theme? To this question no general answer can be given; for sometimes the one mode of procedure may be desirable, and sometimes the other. If your mind is intent upon some subject on which you wish to preach, you will naturally have many thoughts about it before you select a text. The text in this case becomes simply an introductory motto; and therefore it should be sufficiently striking to arrest the attention, and as fully expressive as possible of the theme which you follow in the discourse. In sermons of this kind the text is clearly non-essential, and it would be better to omit it than to leave the hearers wondering what it had to do with the sermon. Nevertheless, its use has the advantages which have been pointed out; and with a little care a really appropriate text may almost always be found. At other

times you may, in the course of your reading, be struck with a text as singularly beautiful and impressive, and full of meaning which is not generally observed. In this case your sermon will flow from the text, and take the form of exposition and application. Before you proceed to writing down your thoughts, you should study the text carefully, so as to understand clearly its original meaning and purpose. Having explained these at the beginning of your sermon, you may show that the words, though in themselves of limited application, nevertheless rest on a universal principle which may be applied to circumstances and questions purely modern. For instance, many of Christ's sayings are concrete illustrations of general principles, and in their literal and limited sense cannot now be observed. As an example I may refer to the commandment to be reconciled to one's brother before offering one's gift on the altar. This brings before us a particular instance of the inconsistency between sincere worship and an unforgiving temper. So, again, in his Epistles Paul deals largely with temporary controversies; but he was not content with practical conclusions. He went down to the root principles on which

the decision of the controversy depended; and the preacher must draw these forth, and exhibit their relation to our present life. For instance, his saying 'Neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,' is connected verbally with a dead dispute, but contains implicitly in that obsolete form a profound and universal principle. The fact is, those days of young and victorious enthusiasm created a language so charged with meaning that it seems inexhaustible, and has perhaps yet to produce its finest results. I may be permitted to say that sermons of this latter kind appear to me to be the most largely fruitful. They carry the mind into the highest regions of thought, and by making the old words live in the hearts of the hearers they are most likely to influence the conduct of life. To the preacher himself also there is this practical advantage, that the words of the Bible furnish him with an endless store of suggestion. It is a good rule, while you are reading, to make a note of any text that strikes you as suitable for future treatment, and to jot down as briefly as possible a few leading thoughts, which you may afterwards expand and arrange.

From the general characteristics of sermons as distinguished from other modes of composition we turn now to the classification of sermons themselves. Several modes of classification have been suggested; but this is really a matter of small importance. If we base our classification on the qualities of sermons themselves, we may divide them into meditative, expository, persuasive, and argumentative. The two first address themselves mainly to the spiritual faculty; the persuasive seeks to influence the motives and the will; and the argumentative aims at convincing the intellect. But while one or other element may predominate, not many sermons afford a pure example of any of these types. The different qualities are blended in various proportions; and in arranging sermons, for convenience of treatment, under the above terms, we must remember that we refer only to the prevailing tone, and that the several kinds are not mutually exclusive.

The meditative sermon is, I think, not very common; and yet it is one which may carry the hearers aloft into the purest and serenest air, and may move them all the more powerfully

because the appeal is indirect, and they are swept along insensibly by the preacher's own emotion. A sermon of this kind is rendered peculiarly difficult by the reticence which Unitarians so generally observe in regard to their devout feelings—a reticence which I am inclined to ascribe to depth rather than to coldness. Genuine reverence does not proclaim itself on the house tops, and it is possible to take the name of God in vain even when we think we are religious. But, on the other hand, a preacher who would reach the depths must draw from the depths of his own spiritual experience, setting forth what he has felt in cherished moments of private communion, not as his own, but as draughts of the water of life derived from the deep wells of universal humanity. It is only in special moods that a purely meditative sermon should be attempted. In general the audience should be sympathetically before the imagination while the writer commits his thoughts to paper; but in preparing this kind of sermon he had better forget every thing but the subject of his meditation, and endeavour simply to relieve his own feelings by giving them expression in language. Or it may

be that the expression is separated by an interval of time from the feeling, and the writer must draw upon his memory of a fading vision. The communion which 'transcends the imperfect offices of praise and prayer' is at the moment speechless. 'While I was musing, the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue.' The influence upon the audience is, as I have said, indirect. There is no definite impression which you obviously intend to produce. The hearers are lifted into a heavenly region where each hears the praise of God in the language of his own heart, and finds his own particular wants supplied from the bounteous store of divine wealth. The sorrowful become aware of a comfort which falls with healing benediction on their grief and pain. The anxious and worried feel a renewed peace and strength, while the angel of trust takes them by the hand, and points to the goal of blessedness for the faithful. The toiler forgets his weariness, while he looks into the face of the great 'Task-master,' and sees it lighted with a Father's love. And he who is beset with sore temptations is made strong to overcome through confidence in the inward Helper. Surely there is no grander

power on earth than this; and all our neology and criticism and controversy must appear poor and barren stuff before the perennial springs of holy living, which remain unchanged through the ages while men's opinions flicker and die. These heights are above us, a holy realm, eternal in the heavens; yet, though our hearts are impure and our tongues may falter, there will be in us, if we are simple and faithful, some little grain of divine power, and God will reveal, even through our imperfect endeavours, something of that ideal which woos the soul, and which, though so coldly and fitfully, still we love.

The expository sermon seeks to draw forth the religious significance of some portion of the Bible, it may be of a single verse, such as one of the beatitudes; or of a passage complete in itself, such as a parable; or of a passage which is part of a larger whole, for instance a portion of an Epistle; or of some historical event; or the life and character of some prominent person, as Saul or David or Peter. The exposition must be based upon commentary. The writer must endeavour, by a careful study of the words and the connection, to understand the original meaning

of the passages that come under consideration, so that he may satisfy all scholarly requirements. Nevertheless a sermon differs widely from a commentary. The commentary is complete when it has gone through the passage word by word, and presented its true meaning. The sermon assumes that this work has been done, and introduces no more of it than is absolutely necessary for the enlightenment of the hearers. The object of the sermon is to draw forth and apply the vital truths which are contained in, and illustrated by, the selected passage.

Perhaps an example may be helpful. Suppose we take for our subject 'the last words of David,' the beautiful little lyric contained in II Samuel xxiii. 1–5. A commentary would deal with the correctness of the translation, the structure of the sentences, the rhythmical arrangement of the words, and the critical question whether David was the real author of the poem. The sermon may take for granted that the Revised Version fairly represents the original; and it is sufficient to point out, in a very brief introduction, that the poem, whether it is really the composition of David or not, is suited to his

character. It may then pass on to the central thought of the sermon, unfulfilled ideals, with the remark that such heroic figures help to reveal us to ourselves by presenting on a large scale features of character which in us are less easily traced. In the body of the sermon the following leading thoughts might be unfolded in connection with the successive clauses of the passage :—A sense of responsibility to a higher Power is fundamental in human nature. This is connected with the sense of authority which belongs to the decisions of conscience. The explanation of this is that it is due to its divine source—'the Spirit of the Lord spake by me.' Associated with this conviction is our tendency to pursue an ideal object—'one that ruleth over men righteously . . . shall be as the light of the morning.' The presence of this ideal life is remarkable in the aged David, because he had had a life of great outward success. To each of us the ideal comes according to our calling in life. But the ideal is connected with unfulfilled aspiration—'my house is not so with God.' For this reason the sense of sin mingles with Christian worship. Yet we must never despair, for God has 'an everlasting

covenant.' We may conclude with a few words of hope, for, as Paul says, 'the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.'

In sermons of this kind it is sometimes difficult to preserve the unity which is necessary for strength of impression. You should select the dominant thought of the passage; and the discourse should be so constructed that its various parts should lead up to, or confirm and illustrate, this thought. In explaining a parable it is peculiarly necessary to attend to unity, not only for the sake of impression, but in justice to the parable itself. A parable is meant to teach one definite lesson, and it is an abuse when a spiritual meaning is found for every detail, thus converting it into an allegory. For instance, in the parable of the ten virgins, if you make the oil represent grace, and those who sell it the priests who administer grace through the sacraments, you introduce ideas which the parable does not contain, and commit yourself to a method of interpretation which is perfectly arbitrary. Whatever variety of application may be allowed, you should adhere to the lesson which you seriously believe Christ intended to teach.

Sometimes an Epistle, or a Prophecy, or a single Chapter is selected for a series of expository sermons. In this case unity may be preserved by confining your attention each time to a passage which has one central and suggestive thought, and is at the same time of real importance in the work under consideration. If you are conducting the service at the same place for several Sundays in succession, you might find a course of this kind very helpful both to yourself and to the congregation. You would, in the first place, be induced to study the work with some care. You would thus enlarge your knowledge, and gain a deeper and clearer insight into the spirit and power of the writer; and, if I am not mistaken, you would often be surprised by the number of suggestive thoughts that would unfold themselves in your mind, which you might reserve for particular treatment at some future time. Another advantage is that you have a subject provided for you week after week, instead of seeking with no clear aim for some fresh topic. The mind is thus led on by a continuous interest, and therefore composes with greater ease, and probably with increased effectiveness. And I may

allude to yet another benefit, derived from my own experience. In going through an Epistle, for instance that to the Ephesians, you come upon a variety of topics, particularly moral precepts, which you might never select if you followed only the bent of your own mind, although they form an important part of the Christian message. It is a little difficult to bring them forward, if there is no special reason for treating them on one Sunday rather than another; but no one can feel offended if they come up in the natural course of your exposition. I have myself, in long past years, preached in this way sermons that I should not otherwise have thought of; and I had reason to believe that some of my hearers were grateful for advice which thus escaped all danger of seeming personal and offensive. To the congregation also the expository sermon is useful and interesting. It may draw forth into fresh brilliance the faded glory of some too familiar passage, or point out unperceived beauty and meaning in places which are not so often read because they require a little scholarly help to illuminate them. Thus the Scriptures come to be regarded with a new and

more intelligent appreciation, and spiritual principles which flashed upon some prophetic soul in distant ages are recognized, with a glow of pleasure, as applicable in the greatly altered circumstances of our own time.

The persuasive sermon has for its end the production of a certain tone of character or of a particular line of conduct. In dealing with purely moral subjects it is difficult to avoid being commonplace and ineffective; for, as a rule, moral duties are acknowledged, and are neglected, when they *are* neglected, not through ignorance, but through selfishness or indolence or mere weakness of motive. In this case you must aim at rousing and strengthening the higher motives. But you cannot produce a motive by simple precept. The will cannot produce a new feeling, or even impart by direct volition the desired force to an old one. The first and great commandment is to love God with a supreme devotion. We acknowledge that the commandment is holy and just and good; but the preacher might repeat it a thousand times without effect. He must so exhibit the Object of this supreme love, and so illustrate its reality and power in human life,

that it will be gradually kindled in the hearts of the hearers, and they will depart from the finished service with a new elevation of spirit and a grander outlook upon life. Or, to take another example, Joy is a prominent note in the early Christian message: 'The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'; 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace'; 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice.' You cannot make men rejoice by lecturing them. You must first make them see how desirable it is that men should have a joyous and cheerful temper, and then you must point out how the obstacles to it may be cleared away through a proper self-discipline, and try to infuse that characteristic Christian Spirit from which joy grows as its natural fruit.

But if your aim is to promote a line of action, you may appeal directly to the will; for the will can control conduct. You will endeavour to put men upon their mettle, and rouse their energy to overcome difficulties. It may sometimes be necessary first to explain the line of conduct, and show its reasonableness. For instance, if you take the injunction, 'Present your bodies a

living sacrifice,' you will naturally begin by explaining its meaning, and showing that it is a reasonable requirement. You will then allude to the difficulties which interfere with its fulfilment, and point out how these may be overcome, not only by firm resolution, but by bearing continually in mind the sacredness of the body as a ' temple of the Holy Spirit,' and as a wonderful gift of God's unbounded beneficence.

We come, lastly, to argumentative sermons. These may conveniently be divided into the simply doctrinal and the controversial. By the former I mean those which seek to explain and establish some generally accepted Christian truth, such as, ' God is love,' God is holy, God is merciful to those who turn to him in penitence, Jesus Christ was the friend of the sinful and unfortunate. The controversial are concerned with one of the great dogmas which are or have been subjects of dispute among Christians, as the dogma of the Trinity, of the atonement, of original sin. A large proportion of sermons belongs to the former class ; for every sermon which sets forth a truth or supposed truth is doctrinal in the strict sense ; and a great preacher might build up a holy and

life-giving faith without once resorting to controversial methods. This is sometimes forgotten, and preachers are blamed for not being doctrinal, when in fact every sermon is replete with doctrine. In regard to this class of sermon I need only say at present that the preacher should be careful not to make it too much of an essay, and should bear constantly in mind its religious significance, and its bearing on human life.

The controversial sermon ought, I think, to be the exception, and never to form the staple of preaching; for, with the very best intentions, it is difficult to make it minister to edification, and it is apt to be attended by injurious moral results, imparting to the 'orthodox' the conceit of superior faith, and to the 'heretic' the conceit of superior enlightenment. Nevertheless, there are occasions when it is desirable or even necessary. Every man ought to be able to give some kind of reason for the faith that is in him; and though this can be most profitably discussed in a class or a lecture-room, the mass of the people can be reached only through the sermon. It is well, therefore, to consider how the end in view may best be attained. The end surely is to pro-

duce religious conviction, a working faith which may be carried into the life of every day. Our first rule, then, is that the sermon should not be simply destructive. Nothing is easier than to make objections. As Dr. Johnson said, 'There are objections to a plenum, and there are objections to a vacuum; but one of them must be true.' Objections skilfully pressed forward may shake, or even overthrow, a man's faith; and if you have only taught him to jeer at what he once venerated, and have not elevated him to the apprehension of higher truth, you have done him serious injury, for the old belief, however faulty in form, may have represented for him a vital spiritual power which made his life pure and honourable. We should rather seek to establish the higher truth, before which error will gradually die away. Do not ridicule or argue against the superstitious worship of Jerusalem or Gerizim; but lift the mind to the spirituality of God, whose temple is the universe, where every spot is holy ground, and the narrowness and bigotry of local worship will pass away of themselves.

Another good rule to be observed in the preparation of a controversial sermon is to imagine

yourself in the presence of a skilled opponent, who will pounce upon any piece of ignorance, and trip you up in any fallacious argument. Now, you want to convince that opponent, not to repel or triumph over him. Therefore you will treat sympathetically the doctrines which he holds, and try really to understand the basis on which they rest, and the spiritual wants which they express or satisfy. You may be sure that your cleverest arguments will only disconcert and irritate, if your opponent feels that you really do not understand his position, and are blind to the religious value of the doctrines which he maintains. Try to get down to the spiritual roots of old belief, and to show that your own is not only more accordant with knowledge and reason, but also may minister to righteous living no less powerfully than that which you oppose. And lastly, use no arguments which have not been carefully considered, and which you do not feel to be really operative in your own mind. If, in the exercise of such candour and love, you press your views with deep personal conviction, you will at least gain the respect of opponents, and will purify the faith of those who agree with you in their belief.

Lecture II

COMPOSITION OF SERMONS

The writing of a sermon involves two things, composition and style. Composition is concerned with the proper arrangement of the thoughts and the suitable proportion of the parts. Under style we consider rules for securing propriety of diction. In this lecture we proceed to consider the laws of composition.

A fundamental law, about which there is no difference of opinion, is that a sermon should be a unity, and not a congeries of unconnected thoughts. This is absolutely necessary if there is to be unity, and therefore strength, of impression. Sometimes we hear a sermon of which every part is good, and listened to with interest, and yet, when it is finished, we hardly know what it was all about, and it soon fades away from the memory. Young composers are peculiarly liable to this failure; for it is sometimes very difficult,

and requires careful thought, to secure the requisite unity. Dr. Martineau has been known to remark, after listening to a student's sermon, that it presented a panoramic view of the universe; and I think, in my own experience of College sermons, a rambling of the thought, owing to want of concentration on a single theme, was the most frequent fault. A good rule for the preservation of unity is to take as your theme, not a word or a phrase, but a proposition; for this gives you a definite thought, to which something should be contributed by every part, whereas, if you start with a word or a phrase, you may easily have a heap of independent reflections, each excellent in itself, but in no way developing a particular theme. One or two illustrations may make this clear. Supposing you take as your subject Humility: you may wander about in a labyrinth of thoughts, and be quite content if each paragraph has something to do with the virtue in question. But if you limit your wanderings by a proposition, you at once obtain a distinct theme, by which the sermon will be circumscribed, and so obtain unity of development. We might have several such propositions: for instance,

Humility, when perfect, loses itself in simplicity and sincerity; humility does not imply a false estimate of oneself; humility is not inconsistent with independence and self-reliance; humility is the basis of other virtues. As another example we may take the word Sorrow. F. W. Robertson's works contain a sermon entitled 'The power of Sorrow.' The mode of expression limits the subject, and is quite sufficient for a title; but, if we were about to compose the sermon, we might express the subject in this way—Sorrow, according to the spirit in which we accept it, tends to death or to life. It is easy to suggest other propositions which would lead one off upon quite different lines of thought: sorrow is a portion of our human lot, and must be designed for a wise purpose; sorrow is susceptible of religious consolation; much sorrow springs from absorption in self; sorrow ought not to be indulged further than to produce its proper fruits; sorrow in bereavement is no sin. Each of these propositions might furnish a subject for a sermon; and, as in gazing at a spacious landscape we see a greater multitude of details when we limit our vision to a single spot, so, when you have confined your thought

in a proposition, material which was before invisible seems to accumulate spontaneously, while you ask yourself, is the proposition true? Does it require any limitations or exceptions? How shall I unfold and apply it so as to make it useful to the congregation?

When you select a particular theme, and choose your text afterwards, it requires only a little concentration of thought to construct your dominating proposition; but in expounding a passage you must endeavour to find, and express in your own way, the controlling thought of the writer. On the latter point I made some remarks in the last lecture; and I may now add that, while the aim at unity should not be forgotten, somewhat greater latitude may be allowed than in the case of themes which originate in your own mind, for the passage is itself the unit which binds the different parts of the sermon together. Sometimes greater unity may be secured by allotting different sermons to the various topics suggested by the passage. Take, for example, the brief parable of the leaven. You might state its theme thus: religion is an inward power which works slowly towards its own perfection. This

suggests two topics, the progress of religion in the individual, and its progress in society. These two are united by the leading proposition, and might properly be spoken of in one sermon; but the line of thought and the application are so different in the two cases that it is better, for the sake of unity of impression, to separate them. The longer parable of the prodigal son easily suggests three distinct subjects for consideration: first, on the way in which sin separates us from our true home in God; secondly, how its misery tends to lead us to repentance and a return to God; and thirdly, how the penitent is welcomed by God more lovingly than by men satisfied with their own righteousness. These, though they are united as parts of a single story, afford ample material for three sermons; and when they are turned from story into exposition, they are so distinct that it is better to treat one at a time. If you are dealing with a passage, say in an Epistle, and have picked out the controlling thought, you may still find it necessary, in justice to the passage, to allude to other thoughts which are embedded in it. You should treat these in a cursory way, and, if possible, as subsidiary to the main thought;

and you might do this in the introduction, so as not to disturb the principal theme when once you have entered upon it.

Having decided on the ruling thought which we wish to impress on the audience, we proceed to the construction of the sermon. A sermon consists of three parts, which, however, sometimes shade almost imperceptibly into one another : the introduction, or, as it is technically named, the exordium ; the main body of the discourse, sometimes called the development ; and the conclusion, or peroration. On each of these some remarks may be made.

The object of the *introduction* is to prepare the minds of the hearers to follow with interest and attention the thoughts which you intend to bring before them. It is therefore not an integral part of the subject, but, as has been said, it ' should be drawn from an idea which immediately touches the subject without forming a part of it.'[1] Its length and character may vary indefinitely according to the purpose which it has to serve ; but we may say generally that it should be clear, brief, and striking. If it is disproportionately

[1] Vinet, quoted by Fisk, p. 108.

long, it wearies instead of riveting the attention. Sometimes a preacher begins with an interesting description or an ingenious metaphor; and if this were limited to a few lines, it would admirably answer the purpose of exciting a benevolent expectation of what is to follow. But unfortunately the preacher is so enamoured of his novel opening that he does not know when to stop, and dwells upon it so long that the mind of the listener is irritated, attention is exhausted, and the sermon is a failure. It is a valuable gift to know when you have said enough. When you have made a good point, leave it; for by lingering over it you only weaken its effect.

The introduction must be suggested by the theme of the sermon; but, as I have intimated, the suggestions may be of the most varied kind. If the discourse is based on some Biblical incident, you may begin by giving a vivid account of the incident, weaving in any necessary explanations. For instance, James Freeman Clarke, having for his subject the universal, but often forgotten presence of God, takes for his text the experience of Jacob at Bethel, and begins with the words 'Jacob was on his journey to the land of his fore-

fathers,' and enlarges on the incident through a couple of pages. He then enters on his subject by saying 'The experience of Jacob is constantly repeating itself in human history.' So, if you take for your text 'God is a Spirit,' you might begin by referring to the accuracy with which the scene is depicted, and the occasion which called forth this great declaration. Or, if your subject is based on a parable, you might refer to any circumstances that make the parable more striking. For instance, in speaking of the parable of the sower you may point out how every incident might have been witnessed by Jesus as he stood on the shores of the Lake; or in connection with the parable of the ten virgins you might describe an oriental wedding. Sometimes the text requires a short exposition, or needs to be placed amidst the surroundings in which it was written. Robertson takes for the text of a sermon entitled 'Man's greatness and God's greatness' Isaiah lvii. 15, 'Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy. I dwell in the high and holy place—with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit'; and he begins, 'The origin of this announcement seems

to have been the state of contempt in which religion found itself in the days of Isaiah,' and he unfolds this statement through a page before proceeding to his subject. Or, again, the text may suggest something quite extraneous, which, nevertheless, is calculated to increase the interest. Dr. Channing has a sermon on 'The universal Father,' founded on the text 'Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also.' He begins by remarking, 'The writings of the Apostle Paul have met with a singular fate. They were intended to reveal the Father's universal and impartial love; and they have been used to represent Him as an exclusive and arbitrary Sovereign.' He expands this thought through two pages, and then enters on his subject by saying, 'In our text we have the central idea of Paul's Epistles.' Sometimes nothing further is needed than to indicate the importance of the subject, and this may be done in a few clear and strong sentences. Or, lastly, you may draw your remarks from your own experience of human life, or from some important or startling event, such as the meeting of the Hague Conference, or an earthquake.

Whatever form the introduction may take, I think it ought in some way to disclose the subject of the sermon. It may effect this without explicit announcement. For instance, J. F. Clarke, taking for his text Acts ix. 11, which ends with the words 'Behold, he prayeth,' begins with the question, 'What was there remarkable in this fact?' He proceeds to answer that question, and leads us to the statement, 'The essential thing in prayer is that it shall be real,' and, without being told, we are already aware that this is the subject of the sermon, which is accordingly entitled 'The genuine prayer.' As another example we may take Dr. Martineau's sermon on 'Christian Peace.' Having referred, in his introduction, to the painful circumstances in which Christ was placed when he pronounced his benediction of peace, he draws the inference, 'The peace of Christ then was the fruit of combined *toil* and *trust*,' and this, in its general application, is the theme of the sermon.

But frequently, and by the best preachers, the subject is expressly announced. J. F. Clarke begins one of his sermons with the words, 'I will speak to you this morning of the joy of Christmas';

and Dr. Channing opens one with the words, 'Religious trust is the subject of the present discourse.' The latter begins another sermon with equal abruptness, but without saying that he is stating the subject, 'No truth is more fitted to touch our hearts than the doctrine of our entire Dependence upon God as the Giver of Life.' The same great preacher, taking for his text 'The glorious Gospel of the Blessed God,' has only a few lines of introduction. He begins by saying, 'These words express the excellence of the Christian Religion,' and, after a couple of sentences, announces his subject thus, 'In this discourse I propose to set before you what it is in Christianity that gives it the chief claim to this high praise.' In another sermon on 'Be ye perfect' he has a much longer introduction, dwelling on the thought that religion is 'the Inspirer of Universal Virtue,' in opposition to the view that it is 'a worship of God, in order to win his favour.' The subject of the sermon is thus not obscurely indicated; but, as his view was not the current one, he proceeds to state it more formally, saying, 'This truth is worthy of development. Let me restate it so that it may be fully understood. I affirm,

then, that the great office of religion is to call forth, elevate and purify the Spirit of Man, and thus to conform it to its Divine Original.' Phillips Brooks, after a page of introduction in one of his sermons, brings forward the subject by saying 'I want to speak to-day about God as the Consoler'; and I remember that Dr. Sadler frequently passed from his introduction by saying 'I wish to speak this morning about' whatever the subject might be. Another useful example is furnished by Robertson's sermon on 'The message of the Church to men of wealth.' He takes for his text the reply of Nabal to David's servants, and has rather a long introduction, remarking on the incidents of the story and the social conditions of the time; but, in proceeding to do so, he announces his subject in a way well calculated to arrest the attention, beginning the sermon thus, 'I have selected this passage for our subject this evening, because it is one of the earliest cases recorded in the Bible in which the interests of the employer and the employed, the man of wealth and the man of work, stood, or seemed to stand, in antagonism to each other.' These examples may be sufficient to illustrate the

different ways in which the subject may be introduced. While avoiding dryness and pedantry, you will do well, as a general rule, to let the audience know your drift near the beginning of your sermon; for they will then follow your thought with more intelligence, and carry away with them a clearer and sharper impression of the whole.

Connected with this is the question whether the main divisions of the sermon should be announced in advance. The practice of great preachers varies in this respect. Robertson constantly states the two lines of thought which he intends to follow; and Dr. Channing is sometimes equally explicit. The expectation of the hearers is thus quickened, and the drift of the sermon is more clearly discerned. Partly owing to this habit Robertson's sermons appear to me to be models of perspicuous thought. There are, however, numbers of admirable sermons in which the divisions are not proclaimed in advance. Much may depend on the subject; and I would only suggest that, when you resort to this method, you should confine yourself to two, or at the most three, leading divisions, and endeavour to introduce your statement of them in an easy and

natural way. I may subjoin a few examples from Robertson. In a sermon on Worldliness the introduction leads him to ask 'What is Worldliness?' He proposes, as his subject, to find an answer to that question, and says, 'We confine ourselves to two points. I. The nature of the forbidden world. II. The reasons for which it is forbidden.' Preaching from I Corinthians viii. 7–13, after a rather long introduction, he proceeds, 'Let us now consider the remainder of the chapter, which treats of the law of Christian conscience. You will observe that it divides itself into two branches—the first containing an exposition of the law itself, and the second the Christian applications which flow out of this exposition.' In speaking of the loneliness of Christ he ends his introduction with the words, 'Very impressive is that trait in his history. He was in this world alone. I. First, then, we meditate on the loneliness of Christ. II. On the temper of his solitude.' Dr. Martineau, treating of 'The Strength of the Lonely' from the same text, has no such marked divisions, but introduces at once two contrasted forms of human character, and then shows that there are in every life

'processes of mind which must be solitary,' and that 'the sentiment of Christ' is needed to sustain us at such times.

We may pass now to the main body of the sermon, the part in which the subject is developed, and for which, in consequence, we may use the convenient term *development*. Before proceeding to consider the best way of laying out the subject, I may refer to qualities which ought always to be present. I have already spoken of the unity which should characterize the whole sermon. This unity should belong not only to the complete development, but to each of its parts. Each part should have its own purpose, and be adapted throughout to the fulfilment of that purpose. It is, as it were, a limb in a larger body, and, like a limb, should be well proportioned, and suited to the discharge of its own particular function. This law of unity precludes the introduction of isolated and irrelevant thoughts. Sometimes, while you are writing, a word or a sentence may suggest an excellent and interesting thought, which you had not included in the original plan of your sermon. You should not introduce such a thought without serious con-

sideration; and if it does not fill up some felt deficiency, and improve the progress of the main theme, you had better make a note of it, and reserve it for a future discourse, in which it may find its proper place. This unity in the several branches of your subject may be most easily secured by the rule which provides for the unity of the whole, that is, by stating its purport to yourself in the form of a proposition. I say 'to yourself,' because it may often, in the actual composition, be equally perspicuous and more elegant to introduce the subject by a descriptive phrase. For instance, if you were dwelling on the circumstances which made the crucifixion peculiarly tragic, you might say to yourself, 'Christ's loneliness made his trial far more bitter'; but you might introduce this to a congregation by saying 'Consider next the loneliness of his position.' The proposition would save you from wandering off into various irrelevant thoughts which the word loneliness might call up, and limit you to the one appropriate aspect of it, its heightening the tragedy of Calvary. Perhaps it may be useful to show by an actual example how this rule may be observed throughout a sermon. In the ex-

ample which I have selected the several propositions are clearly stated throughout, except indeed in the main division. The sermon is one of Robertson's on 'The new Commandment of Love.' After the introduction he proceeds, 'Take, I. The novelty of the law—"that ye love one another." II. The Spirit or measure of it—"as I have loved you."' Under I, we have, 1. 'It was new as an historical fact.' 2. 'It was new in extent.' 3. 'It was new in being made the central principle of a system.' Under II, there are the following propositions, not numbered, 'The love of Christ was the spirit of giving all he had to give'; 'That spirit of self-giving manifests itself in the shape of considerate kindliness'; 'It was a love never foiled by the unworthiness of those on whom it had been once bestowed'; 'It is this *trusting* love that makes men what they are trusted to be, so realizing itself'; 'It is on this principle that Christ wins the hearts of his redeemed.' He ends by an exhortation to 'hold fast to love.'

The other unities, of style and illustration, come, I think, naturally if you are in the same state of mind throughout the composition.

A second rule requires a proper co-ordination of the several parts. The main divisions should stand in a similar relation to the leading proposition; and though they should be carefully connected by a proper transition, they ought to be exclusive of one another. The same remark applies to the subdivisions in their relation to the main division within which they stand. This co-ordination must be united with a proper proportion of the parts. Proportion does not imply that the parts should aim at equal length and emphasis, but rather that these should depend on the importance of the topic under immediate consideration. A thought, which is indeed useful, but is quickly and easily understood, should be treated with brevity; and a thought which is more important and not so readily apprehended justly demands a larger space. Sermons occasionally err grievously in this respect. The preacher, not having carefully arranged his material, dwells far too long on what is comparatively trivial and commonplace, and then has no time to unfold perspicuously the more important aspects of his subject.

And, lastly, order in the arrangement of the

parts should be carefully observed. There should be a real progress of thought, so that the mind of the listener will be led steadily forward towards a final goal. And great care should be taken not to mix the parts together, so as to place under one head what belongs to another. This fault sometimes occurs through forgetfulness, but more often through want of clear thought in working out the subject. I remember having to criticize a sermon, in which every part was such as one could approve, and yet the effect of the whole was unsatisfactory. On analysing it I found that it was badly arranged, and that owing to this the whole made a confused and unpleasing impression. You must not suppose that this is a point of little consequence, on the ground that an ordinary audience could not discover such a technical defect. A beautiful picture must have a proper balance and proportion of parts. If these are wanting, only an artist might be able to point out the deficiency; but the ordinary man, though he could not tell why, would feel that the picture was less beautiful than one in which all the parts were harmonious. So an audience may feel that a sermon is a poor one, they cannot tell

why, for it had many nice things in it; and a critic may perceive that the fault is due to a bad adjustment of the parts.

We come now to the actual distribution of the parts. For this it is impossible to lay down an invariable rule, because much must depend on the nature of the subject and of the end in view. I propose, however, to lay before you a rule which you will often find useful and suggestive, and which, indeed, in thinking over your subject, you may always apply tentatively, and then, in the act of composition, adopt such variations as you may think desirable. Let us suppose, then, that you have determined on your proposition. You will naturally ask yourself in the first place, what exactly does the proposition mean, and, if the meaning is not at once obvious, how can I best explain and illustrate it? You will next ask, is it true? Does it require to be established, either by arguments addressed to the understanding, or, if it be an accepted truth, to be pressed by persuasive appeal upon the heart and conscience, so as to be turned from a sluggish belief into an active faith? If so, what arguments or appeals will be most effective? And, lastly, you will

ask, how ought our acceptance of the proposition to affect our lives? We thus arrive at three main divisions, which we may briefly describe as those relating (1) to the fact; (2) to the reason or proof; (3) to the consequence or application. It is evident that the relative importance of these three heads may vary indefinitely, so that one may even disappear, or become merged in another. For instance, if you are dealing with some truth which is presumably accepted by the congregation, but requires to be amplified, and exhibited in its beauty and power, the whole sermon will probably consist of mingled exposition and persuasion. Or, if you are preaching a controversial sermon, the statement of your own doctrine and of that to which it stands opposed may be very brief, and the bulk of the sermon will be argumentative. Or, again, if you wish to exhibit the bearing of some admitted moral principle on the various circumstances of life, the third head will be prominent, and the second may disappear altogether. But now we may assume the existence of these three heads, and make some remarks upon the treatment of each.

(1) Under the head of *fact* you take up your

fundamental proposition, and unfold its meaning. In spiritual things a proposition may be expressed in the simplest language, and yet be far from easily understood, because we must often make use of figurative language, and still more because words relating to the infinite contain an unfathomable depth of meaning, and to carry the unprepared mind into this wonderful vista of revealing requires both lucid and fervid explanation. Take the simplest proposition—'God is love.' This might easily suggest very erroneous notions, and would therefore require to be explained. You would first try to obtain for yourself a true, though necessarily inadequate, vision of Divine Love, and then to describe your vision so that others may see the truth, or, having already seen it, may behold it illuminated with a fresh splendour. Or, if your proposition be 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,' you must explain the figurative use of 'seen' and then unfold the meaning of the statement—he that has perceived and understood my Spirit and Character has apprehended the Spirit of God, or he that has looked into the heart of the Son has looked into the heart of the Father, on whom the Son so entirely

depends. Or, to take another example, the text may be turned into a proposition of your own. For instance, from Galatians vi. 2 you derive the statement, 'We are required by the law of Christ to bear one another's burdens.' As Paul is declaiming against the obligation of an outward law, you will explain that the law of Christ is the inward control of love, and that the text requires us to carry out practically the directions of love in mutual helpfulness. Such propositions as these would demand considerable fulness in the first head. But others would call for very little explanation. For example, the proposition 'We ought, as far as possible, to live peaceably with all men,' is at once understood, and the greater part of the sermon would be devoted to the application. You may thus see that the proportion which this first head should bear to the whole treatment depends entirely on the subject.

(2) Having fully explained your thesis, you turn to the *proof*, or, if proof be not required, to the persuasive appeal which will make the truth living and active. In speaking of the classification of sermons I gave some hints about the use of persuasion, and these need not be repeated. The

general laws of argument, and the nature of fallacies, must be studied in works on logic; but a few suggestions as to the employment of arguments will not be out of place, and may perhaps be useful.

As affecting the style of treatment you should consider whether you are trying to convince opponents or to confirm in their faith those who already accept your position. In the latter case you will be content with setting forth the positive evidence which seems to you conclusive, and thus drawing out into distinct view the reasons which are more obscurely operative in the minds of your hearers. In some subjects you will feel that you may properly appeal to spiritual experiences as testifying to the truth of what you say. And you will probably think it better not to notice objections, unless you are aware that they are troubling the minds of some in the congregation. A man who is always replying to agnostics and atheists, and telling us that nature is red in tooth and claw, is apt to make us think that after all there is a great deal to be said against religion. This may have an injurious effect upon character, by gradually weakening that strength of con-

viction on which all noble and disinterested action depends ; and thus you produce just the opposite effect to that which you desire. But the case is reversed if you are addressing opponents. Then it is imperative not only to present such arguments in favour of your own position as they may be able to understand and assimilate, but also to consider fully and fairly the objections which lead them to reject what appears to you to be the truth. I need hardly add that for success in this kind of refutation you should be sympathetic and courteous, and do your best to understand all that is really good and strong in the doctrine which is opposed to your own.

Another point to be attended to is this, that if you are advocating a view which is novel, or not generally accepted, the burden of proof, the *onus probandi* as it is called, rests with you. You have now a double task. You must not only refute the prevalent opinion, but you must establish your own by sound arguments. Speakers frequently fall into a fallacy which is very obvious when it is pointed out. They expose various weak places in the opinion which they attack, and then leap to the conclusion that their own view

is correct. But your own view may be as false as that which you assail. You may prove that episcopacy has no miraculous authority; but it does not follow that independency or presbyterianism is more divine.

Connected with this is a precaution which you may do well to observe if you are advancing a proposition which is likely to be unacceptable owing to the prejudice or self interest of your hearers. It is then wise to keep back the proposition, and lead the audience cautiously towards it by establishing principles from which it inevitably follows. You may thus bring conviction even to unwilling minds, whereas, if you blurt out your proposition at the beginning, you may arouse so much antagonism that your arguments will fall dead. This might be described as worldly wisdom, and be treated with scorn by men who consider themselves robust; but it is in reality spiritual tact, by which I mean that it springs from genuine sympathy and love, which, while they will not palter with truth, will be careful not needlessly to offend. It may be impossible but that offences will come, though I think, on the whole, ours are a very tolerant people; but let

us be careful that they do not arise from any vanity or self-display or want of love in ourselves.

A few words must still be said about the treatment of objections. It is laid down in books on rhetoric that refutation is, generally speaking, best placed in the midst of the arguments, nearer the beginning than the end. Some strong arguments prepare the mind to see objections cleared away; and then, when the objections have been removed, some further arguments leave the conclusion impregnable. This may be a good rhetorical device; but it is of higher importance to treat the objections quite fairly, and never rely on an answer which you feel to be unsound. There may be unanswerable objections, which, nevertheless, do not overthrow your thesis; for there may be stronger objections to any other hypothesis, and in many questions we cannot expect more than a reasonable probability. This remark applies chiefly to questions of fact and criticism.

(3) The character of the section on consequences or *application* must vary according to the nature of your theme. You may wish to point out certain results of the principle which you have

established, and your language will then assume the form of statement rather than of appeal. This may be exemplified by Dr. Channing's sermon on 'The universal Father,' which affords at the same time an admirable illustration of the remarks just made on the advantage of postponing the proposition which, if stated at the beginning, might excite prejudice. Taking for his text, 'Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles?' he shows, first, that God has really proved himself in history to be the God of the Gentiles. He then considers the universal principle contained in this doctrine. And, lastly, he applies this principle to our own times—'Is God the Father of the rich only? Is he not also the Father of the poor?' And again he asks 'Is God the God of the good only, or is he not also the God of the wicked?' 'Yes! God loves the most evil.' From this he proceeds to deduce our proper attitude towards the wicked, harmonizing it with a just indignation towards the wickedness itself. Again, your application may consist of instances drawn from human life, on which the doctrine of your discourse has an evident bearing. If you are speaking of the

consolations of religion, you will naturally point out the effect which they have upon the character of those who feel them amid the sorrows and trials, and the petty cares and frets, of life; and thus your application will become in the main descriptive. Or, once more, it may be hortatory, and you will appeal to the conscience and the emotions, so that the will may brace itself to the fulfilment of an acknowledged obligation. The most powerful agent for exciting emotion is the emotion of the speaker; but this of course must not be simulated, for there must be no pretence in the pulpit. But a description which awakens your own feeling will, both by its language and its tone, reach the feelings of the audience. Write, therefore, what appeals to your own heart. You will generally find that some concrete picture in the imagination moves you most, while general statements may be accepted with perfect callousness. I may produce once more a brief, but telling, example from Channing's sermon on 'The universal Father.' He wishes us so to feel the truth that we may apply it. He does not tell us how to apply it, but moves us to apply it for ourselves. He says, 'May we not still learn

a lesson of Divine Wisdom from the manger at Bethlehem? We celebrate this incident of the Birth of Jesus in our churches. Poets sing of it. Painters illustrate it. But do we recall it when we meet the beggar in the streets, or pass the hovel with its patched windows, leaking roof, and smoky walls?' Thus the truth is brought home. We may hear quite unmoved that God is the Father of the poor. Of course he is; but then that beggar whom I passed so scornfully in the street to-day, he too is a child of God, and, even if he has erred and fallen, I ought to have honoured the Divine mystery within him. So, to take another kind of example, if you are pleading for a charity, a few concrete instances of its beneficent work will move your hearers far more than large and vague statistics. The latter should be given first, so as to convince the judgment of the importance and utility of the agency on behalf of which you speak; and then you should enlist the emotions by describing a few affecting cases.

The *conclusion* or peroration answers two purposes. First, it prevents a too sudden ending. It jars on the hearers, and diverts their thoughts

from the subject, if a speaker suddenly ceases without any apparent reason, and they begin to wonder why he has done so. The peroration intimates that the end is at hand, and stimulates the hearers to gather up the last threads of the discourse. Secondly, a well constructed conclusion serves to press home the main lesson of the sermon. It may assume the form of a brief recapitulation or of an appeal. It should be brief and carefully composed, and answer to the heightened feeling which the sermon may have produced. If it is unduly prolonged, the audience becomes weary, and the effect of what has been previously said, instead of being increased, is diminished. It is very necessary to know when to stop. Extempore speakers are apt to ramble on, till they have greatly weakened the force of what they have said. To obviate this, some of the greatest orators have made a point of preparing their perorations not only in substance but in words, and committing them to memory. This practice provides also for their literary finish. In composing your sermon, therefore, you should bestow the greatest care upon the conclusion, lest it should be weak and ineffective, or in any

way unworthy of the subject. Your own heightened feeling will, no doubt, tend to give it dignity and force; but we cannot always, without diligent practice, find the mode of expression which our feeling craves. I have only to add that frequently the conclusion may properly form part of the application; and when the final word in your application forms a suitable close to the sermon, you may only weaken the effect by adding anything further.

One other subject remains before I conclude this lecture. Before writing, and still more before preaching extempore, it is essential to construct what is known as a scheme or a skeleton. This need not be written; for it may exist complete in your own mind. But unless you are extraordinarily logical and methodical in your mental operations, it is better to write it down. When you have it thus under your eye, you more easily judge of the progress of the thought, and of the dependence, order, and proportion of the parts. Without it the thoughts are apt to wander. Irrelevant thoughts creep in, and those that are relevant get misplaced or needlessly repeated in different places. A sermon, in its small way,

is as much an artistic creation as a cathedral, where every part is designed in its relation to the idea of the whole. A beautiful pillar or window owes its beauty not only to itself as an isolated fragment, but to its place and its subservience to the total effect. And as the architect does not begin to build till he has made a complete design, so it is not wise to begin composing till what may be called the architecture of the sermon is clearly before you. When you have a good scheme, the composition is comparatively easy; and, if you are in the habit of preaching extempore, you will have well considered matter at your disposal, and be able to present it in an effective form, and be saved from the fluent and futile loquacity which does no one any good, though it is sometimes admired as eloquence.

APPENDIX TO LECTURE II

Our third meeting, during the delivery of these lectures, was devoted to the construction and analysis of several schemes. Two specimens are here subjoined, which may serve to exhibit the way in which a scheme is constructed. The words in thick type are not ordinarily written, and are inserted simply to show the relation of each scheme to the rules of construction which have been laid down. The first scheme contains all the parts which have been mentioned.

I

Text. I Corinthians ii. 14. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.'

Proposition:—*The psychical man cannot know the things of the Spirit of God.*

Introduction. Importance of the subject:—

1. Important theologically, as indicating the grounds of theological insight.
2. Important practically, as showing how we are to seek for a greater knowledge of spiritual things.
3. Important because able men often dissent from this view; and it is liable to be held fanatically.

Exposition. I. Meaning of 'natural.' It implies man without all that we call the spiritual nature; and therefore the natural man may have high

intellectual power. The word 'natural' tends to give rise to erroneous doctrine. 'Psychical' is better.

Reasons. II. Proof of the Apostle's statement:— we can have no correct idea of any inward feeling or power which we have not experienced.

1. Illustrations:—
   - *a.* The sense of humour.
   - *b.* The perception of the beautiful in nature and art.
   - *c.* The taste for music.
2. Similarly in the spiritual sphere:—
   - *a.* In regard to the perception of right and wrong, and the sense of duty. These are explained away by the man who is merely intellectual.
   - *b.* The higher motives, compassion, love, honour are unintelligible to one who has never felt them.
   - *c.* The wants and aspirations which are turned towards God are known only to those who have them.
   - *d.* So too the spiritual attributes of God can be known only to the spiritual.

Consequence. III. We ought to cultivate the spiritual if we would know more of God. We need not heed the clever objections of one whose spiritual nature has never been awakened, for he is not a judge in spiritual things.

Conclusion. The spiritual the highest principle in our nature, which ought to dominate all the rest.

II

A Christmas Sermon

The sermon has an Introduction, an Exposition in two parts, an Application unfolding the Christmas message to the world, and a Conclusion.

Texts. Matthew iv. 16: 'The people which sat in darkness saw a great light.' John i. 5: 'The light shineth in the darkness.'

Proposition:—*Christianity brought spiritual light to the world.*

Introduction.

1. Natural dualism of light and darkness, day and night.
2. Association of light with good, and darkness with evil, owing to the splendour of light and its use to men, and the dangers of darkness, and its favouring the wickedness of men.
3. It applies especially to truth and error: when we understand a thing we say we see it; when the mind is full of error we say it is darkened.
4. This is especially the case with moral truth and error. Moral truth and goodness are allied: perhaps combined in the saying 'When thine eye is single,' etc.

Exposition. I. Christianity a light, a disclosure of higher truth and goodness, a revelation. This was more than in the teaching, and was associated with personal character. Jesus said of himself 'I am the light of the world'; and of his disciples, 'Ye are the light of the world.'

II. Nature of the light.

1. On this the first Evangelist did not speculate: John universalized it. The light was the eternal light of God, shining with concentrated beams upon the world.
2. That light had been for ever shining, giving light to every man coming into the world: but it shone in darkness, that of sin. Some, however, received it, and became children of God.
3. At last it came with unique splendour to a lowly Son of Man, whose face, for those who had eyes to see, it irradiated with grace and truth. In this way he *was* the light, in contrast with the Baptist, who taught the old lesson, but did not display a new world of spiritual life.

Application. III. The Christmas message is not that the world is dark, but that amid its darkness the light of God is for ever shining.

1. Darkness of the world:—
   a. International hatred and wars, militarism: light, a growing sense of the fraternity of nations.
   b. Within single nations vices and sins and low ideals: Light, pure and sweet homes; individual righteousness.
2. Darkness of the individual:—
   a. Sin; but none so bad as to have no gleams of goodness.
   b. Doubt. Many dark questions: but sufficient light for practical guidance: follow the gleam.

c. Sorrow. Often inexplicable: but the light of God's love shines in the heart, giving trust and peace.

Conclusion. This eternal light shone with such splendour in Christ that he became the great revealer of spiritual things. The life was the light.

Lecture III

STYLE AND DELIVERY

Style may be described as the character or expression of written composition. As every man has his own handwriting, and his own expression of countenance, so, if he betakes himself to authorship, he has his own manner of expressing his thoughts and feelings; and this manner is called his style. With some great writers, for instance Macaulay or Carlyle, the style is so marked that it requires but little critical discernment to recognize it. With others the style delights you by its impressiveness and beauty, but is so free from what may be called mannerism that it requires unusual insight to discover wherein its charm consists. But though good style varies indefinitely, and has its own personal note, it does not follow that it conforms to no rules. The human face is infinitely varied; but still every face is that of a man, and not that of

a monkey or a horse. So all good writers, however great their diversity of style, follow, consciously or unconsciously, certain rules. For instance all, though they may occasionally lapse into oversights, habitually conform to the grammar and idiom of their own language. Hence it is possible, not only to consider in the abstract what qualities of style are most conducive to the object of writing, but to derive general rules from the practice of the best writers. Large and valuable treatises have been written, both in ancient and modern times, upon this subject; and in a single lecture I can only give a few practical hints. In doing so I shall confine my attention to one kind of composition, Sermons, which, as a rule, are both written and spoken. The rules apply also, so far as the speaker's skill will allow, to extempore speech.

First, then, the style should be suited to the subject and the occasion. Clearly a tragedy should not be written in the same style as a comedy, nor a funeral oration resemble a humorous after-dinner speech. Now, in the case of sermons, the subject and the occasion are serious and sacred. The style, therefore, should admit no-

thing that can offend against seriousness and reverence. It is for this reason, I presume, that everything laughable is excluded from sermons. Not that laughter is inconsistent with religion; but it belongs to our lighter moods, and would seem like an intrusion when we are met for worship. Still more should everything that is vulgar or eccentric or ostentatious be avoided. But this does not mean that we are to be stiff and artificial, or affect an archaic phraseology, as though it were better fitted to sacred subjects. The language should avoid all affectation, and be simply the purest and best English of the day. The style should be grave and dignified, and as beautiful as we can make it. We should seek to produce this beauty, not by patches of tawdry ornament or by bursts of grandiloquence, but by the careful finish of every part, and by the purity and rhythm and appropriate imagery through which the thoughts are expressed.

Coming, in the next place, to details, we must survey the admitted qualities of good style. These may be variously classified; but we may conveniently divide them into (1) *Perspicuity*, (2) *Force*, and (3) *Beauty*. This is not a strictly logical

distribution, for the absence of the first would destroy the other two ; but it is sufficiently correct to guide us in the arrangement of our material.

(1) The fundamental and indispensable requisite of good style, then, is *perspicuity*. This follows immediately from the purpose of writing. Your object in writing is to convey into other minds that which is in your own. At least that is the legitimate object, and we will assume that you are not writing for self-display, or with a view to making yourself appear other than you are. This being so, if you fail to communicate your thought to the audience, or make it difficult for them to apprehend it, your style is, to that extent, bad. This remark is true of all composition. Let me use an illustration. A telescope might be most admirable in all its fittings, so that you would exclaim, on beholding it, what a splendid telescope ! And yet if it failed to give a clear definition, so that you could not tell whether you were looking at a steeple or a chimney, it would be a bad instrument, because it failed in the very purpose for which it was made. In the same manner, when a writer, however eminent, so constructs his sentences that competent readers

have to peruse them two or three times before they can collect his meaning, his style, though it may possess in some degree both grandeur and force, is, nevertheless, defective in the most essential quality. If this is true, as I think it is, in the case of writing which is intended to be read, and over which the reader can pause and reflect, much more is it true of a composition which is to be spoken, and which the hearer must understand at once or not at all.

It is well, then, to notice the *causes of obscurity*, so as to be on one's guard against them.

The primary cause is obscurity or confusion in the writer's thought. A man who does not think clearly cannot write clearly. It is important, therefore, to have in your mind a clear arrangement of the whole sermon, and to know in each paragraph, before you put pen to paper, exactly what it is that you wish to express. Hence the importance of a well constructed scheme, which enables you to have a carefully defined mental picture of the whole subject and of its several parts. But though this distinctness of inward vision is an indispensable preliminary to clear production, it does not follow that clear-

ness in production is a necessary result. Indeed, sometimes your own easy understanding of a subject may prevent a lucid explanation of it to others, because you assume that what is so obvious to yourself will be equally obvious to them.

Hence we must remember, in the second place, that much in the proper mode of expression depends on the character of the audience. An illiterate congregation might require a simplicity of language and a fulness of exposition which would seem trite and tedious to one that was highly cultivated; and a sermon which was perfectly clear to the latter might be unintelligible to the former. Dr. Johnson, though so noted for his own stately language, once observed 'that the established clergy in general did not preach plain enough; and that polished periods and glittering sentences flew over the heads of the common people, without any impression upon their hearts.'[1] And on another occasion, referring to the success of the Methodist preachers, he said, 'it is owing to their expressing themselves in a plain and familiar manner, which is the only way

[1] Boswell, under the year 1770.

to do good to the common people.'[1] John Wesley himself said to one of his lay-assistants, 'We, above all, if we think with the wise, must yet speak with the vulgar. We should constantly use the most common, little, easy words (so they are pure and proper) which our language affords. When first I talked at Oxford to plain people in the castle or the town, I observed they gaped and stared. This quickly obliged me to alter my style and adopt the language of those I spoke to; and yet there is a dignity in their simplicity, which is not disagreeable to those of the highest rank.'[2] The preacher, therefore, should endeavour, while writing, to bring before his mind by imaginative sympathy the kind of audience which he has to address. Sometimes a good sermon completely fails of effect because it is addressed to the wrong people. The preacher comes before a strange congregation, provided with a sermon on which he has bestowed great pains; but when he has got into touch with his audience, he feels that the sermon is not suited

[1] Boswell, year 1763.

[2] Southey's *Life of Wesley*, II, pp. 79 sq. It is clear that 'vulgar' in the above quotation does not imply low or coarse, but simply the mass of ordinary people.

to them, and this consciousness chills the fervour of his delivery, and renders his speech ineffective. In such circumstances the extempore preacher has a great advantage, because the interpreting sympathy with the congregation is much more easily awakened when the audience is actually present, and he then adapts his style without effort to the requirements of the moment. It may be said, however, that a good sermon ought to be intelligible to the most ignorant person present, and I remember a distinguished preacher saying that a sermon ought to be understood by every maid-servant in the congregation. It has never seemed to me that this is universally either possible or desirable. A great number of subjects may, no doubt, be treated in a way that will at once reach the understanding of the ignorant and be pleasing to the educated; and so far as the rule leads to clearness and simplicity of language, it is to be commended. But if universally adopted, it would impoverish preaching; for there are heights and depths in the spiritual life that do not come within the experience of those whose religion is still rudimentary, and it would be a grievous loss if we were never led

into these mysterious realms by the great masters of spiritual thought. Much misunderstanding of the New Testament is, I am convinced, due, not to the obscurity of the language, but to a want of spiritual experience in the interpreter corresponding to that of the writer. If I may take a modern instance, complaints have sometimes been made that Dr. Martineau's sermons are difficult to understand. But, if we except an occasional metaphor, the difficulty lies, not in the style, which is singularly lucid, but in the elevation and subtlety of his thought; yet who that appreciates them would lose these great productions of religious genius? These remarks may be sufficient to show that you must attend not only to the clearness of your own thought, but to the receptive powers of your audience.

We pass now from these more personal considerations to the obscurity which arises from *faults of style.* A man may be clear in his thought, and understand his audience, and, nevertheless, be unskilful in composition. It may be useful to dwell on some of the principal defects which render a style obscure.

First, the sentences may be clumsily con-

structed, so as to convey a confused or vague or doubtful meaning. This result does not depend on the length of the sentence; for a long sentence may be perfectly clear, and a short one may leave the author's meaning uncertain. As example is the best teacher, I may quote a long and eloquent sentence from Phillips Brooks. He is wishing to show that no age can send down into history more heroic and poetic deeds than 'the prosaic nineteenth century,' and he proceeds thus:— 'When we think of the adventure of our time; when we recall the great Arctic explorations that have called forth an endurance and daring which have been unsurpassed in other days; when we remember the picturesque meetings of strange peoples, which the advance of civilization has brought about—the meeting of England and Russia face to face in Central Asia, the meeting of Anglo-Saxon and Chinaman on the Pacific shore, the meeting of New Englander and Indian upon the prairies; when we consider the history of slavery in this country with all the passionate experience that it created, the tragedies of private life, the miracles of self-devotion, and the convulsive revolution with which it shook the land;

when we consider these things and a thousand others, what is there that is more romantic than they are in any history of any age?'[1] I quote from Clarendon a long sentence which we may compare with that of Brooks. The historian is speaking of Sir Harry Vane :—'In this giddiness, which then much displeased, or seemed to displease, his father, who still appeared highly conformable, and exceeding sharp against those who were not, he transported himself into New England, a colony within few years planted by a mixture of all religions, which disposed the professors to dislike the government of the church, who were qualified by the king's charter to choose their own government and governors, under the obligation "that every man should take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy," which all the first planters did, when they received their charter, before they transported themselves from hence, nor was there in many years the least scruple amongst them of complying with those obligations; so far men were, in the infancy of their schism, from refusing to take lawful oaths.' These two sentences are of about equal length,

[1] Sermons, 1879, p. 164.

and they agree in bringing before us a copious variety of detail. But how different is the impression which they make. That of Brooks keeps expectation on the alert, and reaches a satisfying conclusion, towards which every part of the sentence was pointing ; that of Clarendon, though intelligible, leaves a very confused image in the mind. What causes the difference ? I think it is that the former possesses a unity in which the latter is deficient. In the former, though the details have no relation to one another, they all contribute alike to the same result, ' This is a poetic and heroic age ' ; in the latter, though the details are more closely related to one another, they do not contribute to any single thought, and it is impossible to tell what the entire sentence is about. Hence we learn that the sentence must possess unity, and all details must tend, not to distract attention, but to heighten the effect. This unity is obtained by limiting the sentence to a single dominant thought, however that thought may be expanded, illustrated, or qualified.

But though attention to unity will save the sentence from confusion, it does not necessarily secure it against ambiguity. This may arise,

even in a very short sentence, from a faulty arrangement of the parts. For instance, here is a sentence from Clarendon :—'Before the death of King James, by the favour of the Duke of Buckingham, he was raised to the place of Lord high treasurer of England.' The order of the clauses would lead us to suppose that the King's death was due to the favour of Buckingham, and it is only the absurdity of such a supposition that saves the sentence from being misunderstood. Let us take a sentence of similar construction :—'As his adversary fell by a well directed shot he too sank to the ground.' Who was hit by the shot? If you intend the former, you should write, 'As, by a well directed shot, his adversary fell, he too sank to the ground.' If you intend the latter, you should write, 'As his adversary fell, he too, by a well directed shot, sank to the ground.' Another instance may be quoted from Blair's Lectures, showing that even the teacher may inadvertently violate his own rules. He says, 'The unmeaning applause which the ignorant give to what is above their capacity, common sense, and common probity, must teach every man to despise.'[1] He has presumably placed 'The un-

[1] P. 381.

meaning applause' at the beginning for the sake of emphasis, and has thereby thrown the whole sentence into confusion. As no particular emphasis seems to be required, the simplest correction would be to arrange the words in the usual English order, 'Common sense,' etc. If 'the unmeaning applause' is retained at the beginning, the latter part might stand thus, 'Every man must be taught by common sense, and common probity to despise.' These simple examples may show the importance of attending to the order of the clauses of which a sentence is composed. And I may remind you that great care is necessary to avoid oversights which will be obvious to a hearer or a reader, because we ourselves, when we write, know beforehand what we mean. I may give an example of this from one of my previous lectures. In referring to the parable of the prodigal son I had written, 'how God welcomed the penitent more lovingly than men satisfied with their own righteousness.' In reading this over I observed the ambiguity. The sentence might mean that God welcomes the penitent more lovingly than he welcomes men satisfied with their own righteousness. But my

thought was that God welcomed them more lovingly than men welcomed them; and accordingly I changed the expression into 'The penitent is welcomed by God more lovingly than by men,' which is without ambiguity.

Another frequent source of obscurity is the careless use of pronouns. For instance, this sentence occurs in the Encyclopædia Britannica: 'Steele's father, who is said to have been a lawyer, died before he had reached his sixth year.' If, instead of 'sixth,' the year happened to be 'thirtieth,' the sentence would be almost certainly misunderstood. The clause might be corrected by saying 'died before the child had reached his sixth year.' This kind of ambiguity may be found in the shortest of sentences: for example, 'John struck Thomas when he was running.' Who was running, John or Thomas?

An antecedent, again, is sometimes separated from its relative in such a way as to make the whole sentence indistinct. As an example, Blair quotes from Sherlock the following:—'It is folly to pretend to arm ourselves against the accidents of life by heaping up treasures, which nothing can protect us against, but the good providence

of our Heavenly Father.' 'Which' ought to refer to 'treasures'; but as such a reference would make nonsense, the sentence ought to be differently arranged, 'It is folly to pretend, by heaping up treasures, to arm ourselves against the accidents of life, which nothing can protect us against, but the good providence of our Heavenly Father.'[1] That this rule is easily violated appears from its breach by Blair himself. He says, 'That such capital words there are in every sentence, on which the meaning principally rests, every one must see.' Clearly he ought to have written, 'That there are in every sentence such capital words, on which the meaning principally rests.'[2]

Again, obscurity may arise from the use of technical or learned words. These sometimes lead the ignorant to think that the sermon is very grand, and that the preacher is a great scholar, and quite up to the mark. You have doubtless heard of the old woman, who, on being asked how she liked a sermon, could only ejaculate, 'Oh! that blessed word Mesopotamia.' And I have heard of a man who, in listening intently to a sermon, at last caught the word 'evolution,'

[1] Lectures, p. 134. [2] P. 146 sq.

when he gave a sigh of satisfaction, and murmured 'Ah! that's it.' I will not vouch for the truth of the following story, but it will serve for an illustration. A preacher, addressing his rustic audience, delivered a learned and original discourse, and had the candour to declare that commentators did not agree with him. The next morning a burly farmer presented himself, with a goodly sack, at the pastor's door, and, on being admitted to his reverence, said, 'I have brought you some very fine potatoes, which I am sure will suit you; for you said yesterday that common 'taters didn't agree with you.' While, therefore, regard may be properly paid to the general state of culture in a congregation, it is well to avoid as far as possible technical or grandiose words, and when it is necessary to employ them before an audience which is presumably unfamiliar with them, they ought to be explained.

Connected with the fault just referred to is the use of ambiguous terms. 'Church,' for instance, may refer to a building, to a congregation, to a sect, or to the general body of Christians. The connection will usually indicate in what sense it is employed; but where any doubt can arise, it

is well to add some epithet or explanatory clause which will make the meaning clear. Doctrinal words, and words which through a long tradition have become associated with doctrine, ought to be used with scrupulous care, and especially if a number of 'orthodox' people are expected to be present; but I do not think we ought to be debarred from using among ourselves words which are charged, for us, with sacred meaning, although that meaning may differ in important respects from that which has been commonly received.

It is needless to say that you should not wrap your style in obscurity through fondness for what has been called 'the pomp and parade of language.'[1] To use a well known admonition, call a spade a spade. Do not call a hairdresser a 'tonsorial artist'; and if you have occasion to refer to Plato, call him Plato, and not 'that wonderful man whose lofty genius raised ancient philosophy to its highest pinnacle, and whose incomparable dialogues have enriched the imagination, delighted the taste, and improved the understanding of seventy generations.' There are, however, occasions when it is proper to refer to

[1] Blair, Lectures, p. 121.

the high qualities of some one to whom you allude. It is then most effective to place the name after the description; for the attention is thus kept on the alert, till it is finally announced who is in the speaker's thoughts, whereas, if the name comes first, the attention may easily wander from the attributes which you wish to emphasize. The use of big words and affected phrases may procure for a speaker, among the unthinking, a reputation for eloquence; but it does not contribute to clearness of thought and depth of impression. But of course this does not mean that, when the mind is all aglow with some exciting thought or ardent emotion, a writer should be denied such splendour of language as comes unbidden from the fervour of his feeling; for such language will move the hearers towards the desired sentiment and make them think, not of the preacher's eloquence, but of the grandeur of his theme.

It is frequently said that, in order to be understood by the common people, you should use words of Anglo-Saxon, rather than of Latin or Greek origin. This has always seemed to me a very questionable rule. It has led to such affectation as 'foreword' instead of 'preface,'

and such a hideous suggestion as 'ungothroughsomeness of stuff' instead of 'impenetrability of matter.' Numbers of words in constant use are derived from Greek or Latin, and are understood by every one. If at a railway station you called for a lifter instead of a porter, I doubt if anyone would attend to you; and if you asked a ticket-collector to tell you where you could find the far-writing room instead of the telegraph office, I am afraid his face would not beam with intelligence. It is, indeed, proper to avoid using unfamiliar words of Latin or Greek origin, if you can express your meaning better in Anglo-Saxon words. But the advice applies in both directions; and surely the just rule is that you should express yourself in the current language of the day, avoiding on the one hand what is coarse or vulgar, and, on the other, words which are unusual or affected, whatever may be their origin.

(2) We must now make a few observations upon *force.* Force is that quality in style which compels attention, and deepens the impression which you intend to produce upon the reader or the audience. From this definition it is evident that it differs from what is ordinarily called

strong language. To call a man a fool or a scoundrel is strong language, but might be weakness in style; for it might excite the disgust of the hearers, and so have the opposite effect to that which you intended. A little delicate irony would be much more forcible. I fear it is impossible to lay down any rules for the creation of a forcible style, for the force must first reside in the depth of feeling and conviction. In the case of a speaker especially more depends on the personality than on the words. I have known a preacher hold a vast audience in rapt attention with words which, when read, were utterly weak and commonplace. But if we cannot create force of style, we may, nevertheless, guard against some faults that weaken it.

Diffuseness, by diluting the matter, diminishes the force of style. One good blow will succeed when a number of gentle taps will be without effect. Use, therefore, only as many words as clearly and fully express your meaning. Avoid tautologies, and be watchful against epithets which, however suitable to the object, add nothing to the sense. Nevertheless, we must not forget that that which is to be spoken may pro-

perly be more diffuse than that which is only to be read; for a general audience requires a little time to appropriate new ideas, or the attention of some of the hearers may flag for a moment, and thus, if the speaker be very concise, they lose the thread of the discourse. Accordingly, some great preachers have been rather diffuse. The matter of many of Dr. Channing's sermons might be easily compressed. But his thoughts were far more novel in his own time than they are now, and, when they came forth radiant with his burning utterance, no one repined at the diffuseness of their expression. But we must distinguish between diffuseness and wordiness. A wordy style is inevitably weak. Indeed nothing is more wearisome than torrents of fluent verbiage from a man who has not taken the trouble to think. If it is desirable to linger on a thought, you should do so, not by diluting your sentences, but by repeating it in other forms, exhibiting it in new aspects or relations, or sometimes illustrating it by a simile. It is often very effective to sum up in a concise sentence at the end of the paragraph the lesson which you have been endeavouring to explain and enforce.

Another caution warns us to avoid, as far as possible, dealing with generalities and abstractions. A concrete instance touches the sensibilities far more surely. It has been pointed out how effective this appeal to the concrete is in the teaching of Christ. He does not say, 'Consider the vegetable creation,' but 'Consider the lilies,' and we at once see the beautiful flower; and then he does not say that it was arrayed more splendidly than kings, but than Solomon, the one magnificent king of Hebrew story. So, if you are describing the horrors of war, a careful picture of a single ruined home will make more impression than saying twenty towns were sacked and burned. In such a description a simple, unadorned statement of the facts will be the most telling. The deepest pathos and the highest sublimity are independent of our poor ornaments and exclamations, and require only the brief and dignified language of unembellished truth.

(3) Of *beauty* I may speak more at length. But I must remind you that our divisions are not exclusive; for that which adds to the beauty contributes also, by imparting pleasure or arousing the imagination, to the impressiveness of style.

The first source of beauty lies not only in the finished structure, but in the rhythmical cadence of the sentences. I confess I am quite at a loss to describe wherein this rhythmical cadence consists. It is as real as that of poetry; but it is not subject to the same obvious rules. It is quite different from that of poetry; for it is a defect in prose to fall into the cadence of verse; and rhyme, which is pleasing in poetry, at least in many kinds of poetry, is offensive in prose. Even when the elevation of the subject may fling a poetical splendour over the style, the music of the language is not the same as in poetry. I fear that in this particular only our own ear and taste can be our guides; but these may be improved by study of the best writers. There are, however, certain faults which may be pointed out. There should not be too many words together without a natural pause, so that a reader must force a pause in order to recover breath. There should not be a sinking in the tone and power of the language at the close of the sentence. Hence small and insignificant words should rarely be placed at the end. Blair quotes from some author the following sentence about the Trinity :—'It is a mystery which we

firmly believe the truth of, and humbly adore the depth of'; and he correctly remarks that it should have been written thus—'It is a mystery, the truth of which we firmly believe, and the depth of which we humbly adore.'[1] Again, monotony is to be avoided. The constant recurrence of the same cadence, which we look for in poetry, becomes wearisome in prose. Sometimes, indeed, for particular purposes, several short, sharp sentences, constructed on the same model, are very effective. But, as a rule, there should be variety in the length and cadence of the sentences. I will add only one other caution. Though you may sometimes prefer one word to another on account of its sound, do not, for the sake of rhythm, insert unnecessary words; for these, if they add to the harmony of sound, weaken the sense, and the loss is greater than the gain.

Metaphor and simile are familiar ornaments of writing or speech. In both of these figures alike the object of which you are speaking is compared to some other object, which it resembles in one or more of its qualities or relations, though in most of their aspects the two objects may have no

[1] Lectures, p. 163.

resemblance to one another. For instance, when we speak of the foot of a mountain, we refer only to the lowest and supporting part of the mountain, and do not imply that that part *looks* like the foot of an animal. When Dr. Johnson says, 'Every desire is a viper in the bosom, who, while he was chill, was harmless; but, when warmth gave him strength, exerted it in poison,' he only describes the effect of desire upon character by comparing it with the action of a viper upon the body. Metaphor and simile differ in this, that the former introduces a comparison without anything but the sense to indicate that it is a comparison, whereas the simile expressly compares the two objects. It is not easy to lay down rules when one or the other is to be preferred; but taste and feeling will seldom fail to decide correctly. Thus, when Christ says, 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a bird gathers her brood under her wings,' we feel in the simile a beauty and pathos which would be lost if we turned it into a metaphor—'How would I have been a brooding bird to thy children.' The same remark will apply to Goldsmith's simile in his description of the village pastor:—

> And as a bird each fond endearment tries
> To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
> He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
> Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.

For an example on the other side take Henry IV's address to sleep :—

> Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
> Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
> In cradle of the rude imperious surge ?

If we turned this into a simile, and explicitly described the rocking of a baby's cradle as illustrating the rocking of the mast, we should have to lament the faded splendour of the comparison. Sometimes the difference seems unimportant. When Paul says, 'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal,' the force would hardly be weakened if he had written 'like sounding brass.' I think, however, we may venture to decide that, when a comparison is prolonged, the simile is to be preferred, and, when much detail is given, it is the only possible form.

The use of metaphor is so natural that it enters largely into our common speech. For instance, we speak of the head of a party, the voice of nature, the shades of meaning, the hard heart, the im-

penetrable stupidity, without thinking that we are using metaphors. Such phrases, in which the transferred meaning has passed into the current idiom of the language, have practically ceased to be metaphorical.

For the employment of metaphor in the strict sense it may be sufficient here to lay down two rules. First, your metaphor should make your meaning clearer and stronger by its appeal to the imagination. It should never be introduced for the sake of its supposed beauty if it is more obscure than the subject which it is supposed to illustrate. When a theme which is quite common has a lurid light cast upon it by something which is known only to the few, the correct order of thought is reversed, and the metaphor, failing of its purpose, merely shows off the writer's knowledge or ingenuity. You will observe how Christ's comparisons are drawn from the most familiar incidents, and by appeals to things which were so common as to be at once recognized he raises the mind to the heights of spiritual contemplation.

The next rule is that metaphors must not be mixed, that is to say, the figurative sentence must not be composed of incompatible elements. The

old ludicrous example explains what is meant :— 'I smell a rat; he is brewing a storm; we must nip him in the bud.' There are equally absurd examples in real rhetorical display. The following are quoted :—'The chariot of Revolution is rolling, and gnashing its teeth as it rolls.'[1] 'We see now that old war-horse of democracy waving his hand from the deck of the sinking ship.'[2] Few, no doubt, would lapse into such ridiculous absurdities; but even good writers are liable to this sort of impropriety. For instance, J. S. Mill writes, 'Society would not be employed in building up propensities with one hand which it has to curb with the other.'[3] Here 'propensities,' which are a building in the first clause become a horse in the second. Even a writer so noted for his style as Addison sometimes forgets his art. His horse turns into a ship :—

> I bridle in my struggling muse with pain,
> That longs to launch into a bolder strain.[4]

[1] Report of a speech by a German Socialist.

[2] American newspaper.

[3] Quoted from *Subjection of Women*, by A. S. Hill, *The Principles of Rhetoric*, pp. 126 sq., who also quotes the two previous examples. Observe also in Mill's sentence the misplacement of the antecedent.

[4] Quoted from his *Letter from Italy* by Blair, p. 194.

Elsewhere he treats seeds as though they were sparks :—'There is not a single view of human nature, which is not sufficient to extinguish the seeds of pride.' Clearly, 'extinguish' ought to be extirpate or root out.[1]

Akin to the mixed metaphor is a blending of the literal with the metaphorical sense, except, indeed, when the literal statement is applicable at the same time to the metaphor. We may take an imaginary example. If you say, 'He was a lion in the fight, and pierced his enemy's shield with a spear,' you seem to ascribe the use of a spear to a lion. But you might say, 'He was a lion in the fight, and tore his way through the opposing ranks'; for though the latter statement is literal it is not inconsistent with the action of a lion. The following horrible mixture is quoted from Pope's translation of the Odyssey :—

> Now from my fond embrace by tempests torn,
> Our other column of the state is borne;
> Nor took a kind adieu, nor sought consent.[2]

Here a column is torn from a fond embrace, and is so unkind that it does not say 'good-bye.' It is perhaps needless to say that Homer's exquisite

[1] Quoted by Whately, *Rhetoric*, p. 459.
[2] Quoted by Blair, p. 191.

and touching lines are not responsible for such stuff.

These instances are sufficient to show how careful we must be in the use of metaphors, if they are to attain their proper end, gratifying the taste and illuminating the subject. I have only to add that it is a violation of good taste to crowd incongruous metaphors together, and that even a fine metaphor becomes displeasing if it is dwelt on at length, or is often repeated. A simile may properly occupy more space; but it, too, easily becomes wearisome, and fails of its effect, when it is too protracted. As soon as the features on which the resemblance depends have been presented vividly to the imagination, the simile has completed its work.

Closely related to metaphor is personification. This also, by its appeal to the imagination, adds, when judiciously used, force and beauty to the style. Its commonest form consists in applying to inanimate objects epithets which properly belong only to living beings, as the raging ocean, the greedy fire, the angry sky. Such epithets, if they come naturally, may be freely used; for they invigorate the thought, and do not suggest

the presence of tawdry ornament. But much greater care is required in personifying abstractions, such as remorse, or avarice, or cruelty. Sometimes this figure may be very powerful; but it should not be frequently employed, and is appropriate only when the thought and style have reached a kind of poetical elevation. The great rule for the introduction of all these beauties of style is to allow the language to be proportioned to the real feeling. If the inward fire burns, let its radiant sparks fly forth, and light up the sermon with the splendours of fervid speech. But if the feeling is at its normal temperature, glowing oratorical figures will be out of place, and, if introduced for the sake of display, will become offensive.

Personification is sometimes combined with apostrophe; but this is hazardous unless it is supported by previous eloquence. In its fitting place it has a powerful effect. I am tempted to quote a splendid example from a sermon of John Wesley's. He has been inveighing, in a strain of indignant oratory, against the Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation, and ends with an outburst of ironical apostrophe:—'Ye cannot flee from

an omnipresent, almighty tyrant. And whether ye flee or stay, I call heaven, his throne, and earth, his footstool, to witness against you: ye shall perish, ye shall die eternally! Sing, O hell, and rejoice, ye that are under the earth! For God, even the mighty God, hath spoken, and devoted to death thousands of souls, from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Here, O death, is thy sting! They shall not, cannot escape, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Here, O grave, is thy victory! Nations yet unborn, or ever they have done good or evil, are doomed never to see the light of life, but thou shalt gnaw upon them for ever and ever. Let all those morning stars sing together, who fell with Lucifer, son of the morning! Let all the sons of hell shout for joy; for the decree is passed, and who shall annul it?'[1]

I must conclude this lecture with a few remarks on *delivery*. As the prime quality of style is perspicuity, so the prime requisite of delivery is to be audible. To secure this, three simple rules should be followed:—fill the lungs well; open the mouth, so as to allow the sound to come freely

[1] Quoted in Southey's *Life of Wesley*, II. p. 389.

forth; and attend to the articulation of the consonants. It is hardly necessary to add that you should speak to the audience, and not to the desk or to your feet. The degree of loudness which is required depends on the size of the audience and of the building. It is a good rule to look at the most distant person, and begin by speaking to him; for the voice then spontaneously adjusts itself to the needs of the occasion. It is well also to remember that in addressing a large audience it is necessary to speak more slowly than in addressing a small one.

Audibility, however, though it is indispensable, is not sufficient for a pleasing and effective delivery. Proper emphasis is necessary; for on this the expression of what we mean is largely dependent. An old example is supplied by the question, 'Do you ride to London to-day?' This may have six meanings according to the word which is emphasized. You can hardly go wrong in pronouncing your own composition; but in reading some one else's sermons, or in reading the lessons, a slip is easily made if you have not, by studying them at home, become familiar with the sense. We may usefully dis-

tinguish stress and emphasis. Every sentence, though it may not contain a word that would be usually described as emphatic, nevertheless has words which require more stress than others ; and both the clearness of the meaning and the beauty of the expression depend upon the proper variation of the stress. One of the Psalms begins thus:— 'I will sing of mercy and judgment : unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.' The Psalmist is announcing his subject ; therefore the stress falls on 'mercy' and 'judgment.' He will make his hymn peculiarly solemn by addressing it to the Lord, and so the stress is laid upon 'thee.' The more vehement stress which is called emphasis is used when you wish to direct special attention to a word ; for instance, when it contains some express or implied contrast. Thus in the sentence, 'Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen,' the words 'base' and 'despised' are emphatic, because they stand in opposition to the 'mighty' and the 'noble.' It is important to remember that restraint in the use of emphasis is very necessary if it is to have its proper effect. I have heard a sermon delivered as if it had been written in italics, with

the result that all genuine emphasis was lost, and the manner soon became wearisome.

Again, a good delivery must have variety and expressiveness of tone. To obtain these, resort is sometimes had to the professed elocutionist. I must confess, for my own part, that I utterly distrust his lessons. They may be useful to an actor; for we expect an actor to assume the tones which are appropriate to his part, and we applaud him when he succeeds. In singing also, since the object is the perfection of sound, the singer cannot be too thoroughly trained in his art. But in the pulpit the end is wholly outside the region of artistic skill; and any display of elocutionary power would be an affectation, and, by savouring of insincerity, would defeat its proper end. What, then, is to be done? The proper course, I believe, is to train the voice. This may have its range and flexibility greatly increased by suitable exercises, and be made into a worthy organ for the expression of thought and emotion. Then at the time of delivery let nature take its course. Forget all but your subject and your audience, and the feeling which is growing within will reveal itself in the tone.

One other point, however, is of great importance. I have known excellent sermons made utterly ineffective by a dismal and monotonous delivery, although it was impossible to doubt the sincerity of the preacher. His feeling failed to express itself owing to a mechanical impediment. In reading the sermon his attention was so fixed upon his manuscript that his feelings had no room to play. To obviate this difficulty you should be quite familiar with your sermon, so as to be able to speak it, without being continually tied to your manuscript. A mechanical difficulty attending the utterance interferes with self-forgetfulness, and obstructs the flow of emotion. In order to acquire the manner of a speaker, as contrasted with that of a reader, it is a useful practice to commit the first few lines of the sermon to memory, so that you will begin by looking at your audience, and speaking to them ; and then, if you know the sermon sufficiently well, you may retain the speaker's manner throughout. Extempore preaching, if you have no difficulty in finding words, helps to develop a good style of delivery. The matter should be carefully prepared, so that the sermon may not become wordy

and shallow; and if you are full of your subject, you will probably speak with a force which the written composition seldom reaches. It is, I think, a good plan to use both kinds of sermon. Writing provides for the exercise of thought and style; extemporaneous address cultivates a free and forcible delivery.

Lastly, the question may be asked whether much action should be used. This, I think, ought to be left to natural impulse, and our rules must be negative. Never assume an attitude for the sake of effect; for this is an offence against sincerity. To such affected and insincere action Dr. Johnson's ridicule justly applies. 'Neither the judges of our laws,' he says, 'nor the representatives of our people, would be much affected by laboured gesticulation, or believe any man the more because he rolled his eyes, or puffed his cheeks, or spread abroad his arms, or stamped the ground, or thumped his breast, or turned his eyes sometimes to the ceiling, and sometimes to the floor.'[1] Nevertheless, gesticulation which is the natural and spontaneous expression of emotion undoubtedly has an influence on the audience;

[1] Boswell, year 1758.

and if it is called into activity by genuine feeling, I would not try to repress it. Let each man be true to himself. To some, action comes much more readily than to others; and the extempore speaker is more prone to adopt it than the reader. But to all alike the advice may be given, to avoid all ungainly or undignified postures or movements. Guard against mannerism. As we are generally quite unconscious of our own awkwardness, it may be well to ask some candid friend to give us a hint if he sees anything that needs correction.

In conclusion let me express a hope that you will continue, with growing grace and power, to proclaim what you feel to be vitalizing truth, and that you will never despond or grow weary in well-doing, believing that the Lord of the harvest will give richer and more abundant fruit than our poor efforts can ever deserve.

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